

Applying Appreciative Teaching Practices to Music Therapy Education

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Abstract

Music therapy is the clinical and evidence-based use of therapeutic music experiences to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional. To be eligible to teach in an undergraduate music therapy program, one must acquire a master's level degree; however, this degree requires no education in pedagogy. A vast amount of literature is published about effective teaching methods including student-centered learning and Appreciative approaches. Music therapy pedagogues have identified general teaching methods and approaches, and faculty may be applying effective teaching approaches. However, there is minimal evidence for specific techniques on how these approaches and techniques are being implemented. Based on the findings from my dissertation study, the purpose of this article is to share innovative practices discovered from that work. Effective teaching practices in music therapy are overall student-centered and faculty are encouraged to teach utilizing the Appreciative Education framework. Examples of applying the 6-D Appreciative Education framework in music therapy education are provided in addition to a discussion of implications for practice.

Keywords

Appreciative Education, music therapy, pedagogy, higher education, faculty learning

Music therapy is the “clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program” (American Music Therapy Association [AMTA], 2022, para. 1). AMTA establishes the criteria for competency-based standards that “ensure the quality of education and clinical training in the field of music therapy” (AMTA Professional Competencies, 2022, preamble). In designing music therapy programs, undergraduate course curricula are established based on the AMTA competencies, and educators are expected to teach to these designated competencies. In addition to curricular course content, AMTA requires that music therapy students have 180 hours of clinical training in the field before attending their internship (approximately 900 hours). Including the internship, a total of 1,200 clinical training hours must be completed before being eligible for the board certification exam. After successful completion of the board certification examination, the student obtains the credentialed title, MT-BC (Music Therapist-Board Certified).

Currently, there are 85 institutions offering a bachelor's degree in music therapy and 243 full-time faculty in the United States (AMTA, 2022). Programs are accredited by AMTA based on the curriculum outline and courses that are taught. AMTA also provides guidelines for eligible undergraduate faculty, including degree achieved, years of experience, and clinical competence for someone to teach in a music therapy program (AMTA Standards for

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Education and Clinical Training, 2022). Although these are standard qualifications for staffing undergraduate programs, disciplinary expertise in pedagogy and years of teaching experience are not required.

Given the paucity of research on this topic, I conducted a dissertation study to identify effective teaching practices of undergraduate music therapy instructors (Ravaglioli, 2022). The qualitative case study consisted of semi-structured interviews and classroom observations of five full-time music therapy faculty, as well as collection of relevant artifacts, to determine current effective teaching practices. The research resulted in the discovery of the implementation of the Appreciative Education framework within music therapy education. Based on the research findings and implications for practice of my dissertation research, the focus of this article is to offer practical innovations for others seeking to adopt the Appreciative Education framework within music therapy programs.

Education in Music Therapy

Included in the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda by the United Nations General Assembly (2015) is the need to increase the quantity of qualified teachers and to offer opportunities for lifelong learning. However, Zakrajsek (2011) noted that there is a general acceptance that being an instructor in higher education requires no disciplinary proficiency in pedagogy because there is almost no certification or demonstration of competence before allowing individuals to teach in higher education. This practice directly aligns with the AMTA Standard for Education and Clinical Training (2022), which similarly does not require proficiency in pedagogy.

There is limited literature on types of teaching methods that have been implemented in designing music therapy courses and approaching teaching (Goodman, 2011; Hiller et al., 2021). Despite a limited number of publications on pedagogical techniques and approaches in music therapy, there is vast research on effective approaches in higher education in general (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Carnell, 2007; Chalmers & Fuller, 1996; Delaney et al., 2010) from which music therapy instructors may draw.

Although music therapy instructors may be implementing effective pedagogical practices, the literature in music therapy does not reflect these applications. Therefore, it is important to transmit the applications of effective approaches in other disciplines to the field of music therapy.

Effective Teaching Approaches

According to Delaney et al. (2010), characteristics of effective instructors include being respectful, knowledgeable, approachable, engaging, communicative, organized, responsive, professional, and humorous. Aligning with these results, Wright (2011) spoke to the role of the instructor, “students are the center of the educational enterprise, and their cognitive and affective learning experiences should guide all decisions as to what is done and how” (p. 93). Learner-centered approaches allow for students to take responsibility for their own learning, which may alter the traditional balance of power (Wright, 2011). Shifting to a student-centered learning environment in higher education begins with educators giving students respect and designing pedagogical practices for “the students we have, not the student we wish we had” (Goldrick-Rab & Stommel, 2018, p. 5). The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U, 2002) suggested that colleges and universities place importance on teaching students to become “intentional learners” (p. 21).

As educators, it is important to help students relate the curriculum to what is happening in their inner lives, which reduces the disconnect between the learning that is

intended and the actual learning experience (Harrison & Mather, 2016). The connection between inner and outer worlds creates an emotional tie that affects rational thought in students. Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007) indicated that emotional engagement is necessary for the skills and knowledge that students acquire in school to transfer to new situations and real life. There is also evidence to suggest that a students' well-being is a key mediator in emotional engagement (Pietarinen et al., 2014). Research findings provide evidence that well-being and learning are interrelated, and that when educators nurture students' positive emotions and embrace their strengths, student learning and development can be enhanced (Mather, 2010).

As an effective pedagogical practice, building relationships with students through a strengths-based approach may accomplish a more accessible learning environment. Research in Positive Psychology suggests that greater student well-being contributes to achievements in learning and productivity (Marks & Wade, 2015). Seligman (2010) identified five elements of well-being: positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishments (PERMA). The more educators can emphasize student well-being and strengths, and create positive expectations, the more engaged students will be, and the more meaning students will make out of the learning process.

Stemming from Seligman's Positive Psychology, Appreciative Inquiry is a strengths-based approach that is collaborative and participatory and generates positive change through "inquiry, imagination, and innovation" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 8). Utilizing an Appreciative approach supports the well-being of students, which can contribute to emotional engagement, and therefore, the development of the students' deep learning experiences.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a strengths-based, positive approach in the field of organizational development, developed by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987). Appreciative Inquiry is a "process that inquires into, identifies, and further develops the best of what is in organizations in order to create a better future" (Coghlan et al., 2003, p. 5). The five core principles of AI are the constructivist principle, the principle of simultaneity, the poetic principle, the anticipatory principle, and the positive principle (Coghlan et al., 2003).

Cram (2010) provided an overview for each of these principles. The *constructivist principle* refers to reality being socially constructed through language and the *simultaneity principle* states that change starts when a question is asked. The *poetic principle* emphasizes that one's choices determine what one discovers, and the *anticipatory principle* refers to shaping one's present through one's outlook of the future. Finally, the *positive principle* states that positive inquiry leads to positive changes.

These principles are the foundation for the 4-D model of Appreciative Inquiry: Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny (Coghlan et al., 2003). These 4-Ds support self-development and the development of inter-personal relationships (Cram, 2010). The framework of Appreciative Inquiry can be applied to a variety of accounts and settings.

Bloom et al. (2008) expanded the 4-D model of Appreciative Inquiry into the 6-D model of Appreciative Education. The Appreciative Education framework is rooted in social constructivism, Positive Psychology, and Appreciative Inquiry (Bloom et al., 2013) and has been adopted and applied to multiple fields and areas of education (Bloom, 2023; He et al., 2014).

Appreciative Education

Appreciative Education is a framework for “educators to embrace positive mindsets, leverage learners’ assets and strengths, and empower learners to take ownership of the learning process for their academic success” (He et al., 2014, p. 1). Appreciative Education is based on a 6-D model including the following phases: Disarm, Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver, and Don’t Settle (Bloom et al., 2013). Each are explained in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Appreciative Education Phases and Definitions from Bloom et al. (2013)

Appreciative Education Phases	Definitions
Disarm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizes that power differentials exist • Emphasizes reminding participants to be especially cognizant of the importance of creating safe environments where all members feel that their voice is valued and respected
Discover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasizes the importance of using positive, open-ended questions focused on learning other people’s perceptions of their own personal strengths and the strengths of the organization of which they are a member • Enhances the development of interdependence within the teaching/learning process
Dream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dreams can include visions that are much bigger, and sometimes may even be perceived unrealistic • Collaboration to draw from similarities across dreams and create shared visions
Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An action plan where individual strengths are aligned to achieve both individual and shared dreams • Plan is co-constructed and evolving
Deliver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entails thoughtful actions taken to carry out the individual plans created during the Design phase • Emphasizes the importance of personal resilience as obstacles and challenges arise • Acknowledges that the dream is in the present and supports student in challenging times
Don’t Settle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The idea of “positive restlessness” within and among individuals and organizations • Discovery of the past and dreaming of the future are impacted by one’s perception of the present

Appreciative Education is applied during interactions within such educational settings as advising, student affairs, assessment, leadership techniques in administration, collaborative research projects, and classroom instructional practices (Bloom, 2023; He et al., 2014). In

each setting, the six phases are cyclical and ongoing to maintain engagement and continue development. The application of Appreciative Education integrates a social constructivist approach, as “knowledge is constructed through collaboration” (Bloom et al., 2013, p. 6). Undergraduate educators can create an Appreciative and interactive learning environment in which students are able to take ownership for their knowledge. Such a learning environment can occur both inside and outside of the classroom experience and be applied to specific disciplines such as music therapy for students to build strong connections from past and present experiences.

Appreciative Education in Music Therapy Education

The foundations of a student-centered approach to teaching, including creating positive relationships between the student and teacher and co-constructing the learning environment, are evident in music therapy education. Based on the findings of my dissertation research (Ravaglioli, 2022), these fundamentals make it apparent that Appreciative Education approaches are implemented by music therapy faculty, as music therapy educators often employ the Disarm, Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver, and Don't Settle phases in a cyclical and ongoing manner. Faculty institute opportunities to co-create knowledge in a welcoming environment, which is indication that the six phases are applied to the faculty participants' teaching practices. These phases are implemented during one classroom experience, across a semester, throughout the year, and along the undergraduate journey of the students. How music therapy faculty employ each phase of the Appreciative Education framework is more closely explored in the following section.

Disarm

The purpose of the Disarm phase is to create a welcoming and safe learning environment (Bloom et al., 2013; He et al., 2014). The Disarm phase is formed by faculty establishing a safe, authentic learning environment in which students experience the classroom with a positive and welcoming learning atmosphere. The welcoming and open environment is established by building rapport, making sure students are comfortable, and playing music in the background as students enter the classroom. Ways of building rapport and breaking down barriers include use of humor and appropriate self-disclosure. Throughout the duration of the class, relaxed body language and welcoming gestures are used, meeting students at their level, which contributes to a non-hierarchical setting. This constant authentic and safe environment allows for students to share ideas and thoughts in discussion and reflection. Faculty continue to check in about previous weeks, upcoming weeks, and the current state of how students were feeling about assignments and/or class concepts.

Discover

The Discover phase engages in strengths-based reflection to identify effective learning strategies that are working (Bloom et al., 2013). The Discover phase in music therapy classrooms is evidenced by using positive statements and open-ended questions. These questions assist the students in original discoveries such as how a task or idea could be executed differently. Questions are asked in different contexts during various segments of classroom experiences.

Dream

Dream refers to creative visions that individuals may possess to motivate and set goals (Bloom et al., 2013). The Dream phase is apparent in music therapy classrooms when assisting students in formulating visions, specifically evidenced by connecting educational experiences to personal lives. In addition to connecting concepts to personal lived

experiences, faculty also connect concepts to the music therapy competencies, allowing the students to apply knowledge to professional music therapy practices. Discussion, analysis, and personal storytelling of experiences allow students to reflect on learning accomplishments and recognize their individual visions. Through open-ended questions, faculty assist students in connecting personal experiences to relevant topics, co-constructing knowledge and dreams, demonstrating the cyclical and ongoing phases of the six phases.

Design

The Design phase is the action phase during which students are encouraged to take responsibility in their learning process by aligning their strengths with their goals (Bloom et al., 2013; He et al., 2014). In the Design phase, faculty assist students in devising achievable goals by providing structure. Faculty focus on specific topics and are consistent with providing relevant examples. Classes may begin with a demonstration related to the lecture and/or a student-led experience. This model of showing and doing helps the students devise achievable goals for their progress. Discussions are facilitated after experiences, which promotes clarity in understanding and brings realistic ideas of achievement into focus to promote significant learning experiences. The process is co-constructed with faculty and students and continues to evolve with the learning and discovery process.

Deliver

Deliver refers to carrying out the Design phase and reflecting on the process to develop resilience in the learner (Bloom et al., 2013). During the Deliver phase, faculty support students to set high self-expectations by “doing” the action. This phase is represented in classroom experiences by students demonstrating relevant techniques through presentations, leading experiences, group work, musical role playing, and interactive participation. After the faculty teaches a concept, it is the students’ responsibility to synthesize and demonstrate the skills and/or knowledge acquired. The students present (deliver) what they practiced, and through open-ended questions, faculty support the development of student-learning experiences. Faculty continue to check in with students in a supportive way and give feedback during group work and/or after presentations. Faculty also intentionally review concepts and support the knowledge students acquire.

Don’t Settle

The final phase, Don’t Settle, is an opportunity to raise expectations and challenge students to new levels of excellence (Bloom et al., 2013). Faculty demonstrate the Don’t Settle phase by challenging students to set high self-expectations and think critically by using open-ended questions. The open-ended questions stimulate deeper thought into a concept, promoting an ongoing desire for further learning and development in the field of music therapy. Examples of open-ended questions and platforms for provoking deeper thought are the use of word clouds followed by discussion and questions such as, “What worked well?” and “What did you notice?” These discussions and questions prompt students to remember specific key words and concepts from the semester and allow them to connect their knowledge to the presented examples and personal experiences. This phase reinforces the cyclical and ongoing nature of the Appreciative Education framework, as the open-ended questions continue to provoke thought for discovery and re-design.

Table 2 illustrates how the six phases of Appreciative Education can be implemented in music therapy programs. The examples provided include sample questions that faculty may ask students.

Table 2

Implementing the Six Phases of Appreciative Education within Music Therapy Programs

Appreciative Education Phases	Implementation	Examples
Disarm	Welcoming authentic environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music playing in the background • Relaxed body language • Conversations to “break the ice” • What is something you are looking forward to? • What has been the highlight of your day?
Discover	Asking open-ended questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquiries and challenges • Facilitate reflection on positive aspects of experience. What worked well for you? What did you notice?
Dream	Connecting experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relating to experiences, students share personal stories • Working together to create ideas of possibilities • What is a time that you have felt that way? How can you relate?
Design	Class structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear focus • Experiential practice • Restating student comments to find meaning • Co-create a plan for future • How do you foresee achieving that?
Deliver	Doing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student presentations and interactive participation • Provide constructive feedback • How was that experience? What did you notice?
Don’t Settle	Open-ended questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to challenge to think critically • Continuously creating new goals to continue student development • What worked? What did you notice? How did you feel when...? What’s next?

Discussion

The findings from my dissertation study (Ravaglioli, 2022) revealed effective teaching practices in music therapy education (Doyle, 2011; Hey et al., 2016; Smart, et al., 2012; Weimer, 2013, 2022), including student-centered learning incorporating experiential learning (Goodman, 2011), which connect concepts to experiences. By implementing a

student-centered approach and creating a safe and positive learning environment, music therapy faculty can enter the world of the students to co-construct knowledge most effectively. Additionally, Appreciative approaches were also significantly present, as music therapy faculty integrated concepts such as constructivism and positivity into their pedagogical practices.

Faculty in my dissertation study aspired to create positive interactions with students in their use of validation during evaluations and creating a safe classroom environment (Ravaglioli, 2022). According to Bloom et al. (2013), the Appreciative Mindset is significant in creating positive interactions with others and is demonstrated by finding the best in others and looking at what is working well. The implication of working within an Appreciative Education framework is that it is adaptable and interactive and, therefore, can be implemented in any teaching or supervisory scenario.

Pedagogical practices of music therapy faculty align with the six phases of Appreciative Education: Disarm, Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver, and Don't Settle. Faculty establish an opportunity to co-create knowledge in a welcoming environment, which is evidence that the six phases are applied to the faculty teaching practices. These phases are implemented throughout one classroom experience, across a semester, throughout the year, and along the undergraduate journey of the students. The next section highlights implications for innovative practice based on these findings.

Implications for Innovative Practice in Music Therapy Programs

Appreciative Education is a framework for educators to encourage growth mindsets, utilize students' resources, and empower individuals to take ownership of their learning (He et al., 2014). Although faculty may demonstrate Appreciative Education practices, this framework itself is largely unfamiliar in the education sector of music therapy.

Literature on education and teaching in music therapy focuses primarily on traditional learning, teaching, and development theories (Goodman, 2011; Hiller et al., 2021). My dissertation study revealed that music therapy faculty also incorporate student-centered and Appreciative approaches, including constructive learning, positivity, and well-being. The six phases of the Appreciative Education framework offer a practical approach within which music therapy educations can work.

- **Disarm:** The Disarm phase in music therapy classrooms can be defined as creating a safe, authentic learning environment. A welcoming and positive environment can be created various ways including playing music while students enter, maintaining relaxed body language, and continuing to check in about student well-being and progress.
- **Discover:** The Discover phase may be defined as using generative, open-ended questions. Music therapy faculty continuously utilize open-ended questions to inquire and challenge students throughout class. These questions lead to students' original discoveries.
- **Dream:** Dream can be defined as assisting students in formulating a vision of their future by connecting experiences to their goals and aspirations. In the case of music therapy education, connecting experiences refers to music therapy faculty relating concepts to personal and clinical instances. Faculty allow students to share personal stories, which assist in creating their own thoughts and opinions about course-related topics.

- **Design:** The Design phase is defined as assisting students to devise achievable goals by providing structure. Faculty give clear focus to specific topics and provide relevant examples. Restating student ideas to become more clear gives significance to the learning experience. Faculty also provide time for experiential work during class which contributes to application and comprehension.
- **Deliver:** Deliver is defined as supporting students as they are “doing” the work to carry out their plans to meet their goals. Students can demonstrate their understanding of and growth in personal, classroom, or clinical goals through presenting experiences. Examples of “doing” include student presentations, group experiences, musical role plays, and interactive participation. After faculty present a concept and demonstrate the technique, the students have the opportunity to experience that concept in some form of active involvement. Faculty continue to check in on students in supportive ways and provide constructive feedback.
- **Don’t Settle:** Finally, the “Don’t Settle” phase can be defined as challenging students to set high self-expectations. The most prominent way of implementing this phase is by continuing to ask open-ended questions. Faculty challenge the students to think critically by asking open-ended questions to stimulate deeper thought into a concept. Some examples of open-ended questions and statements faculty utilized to challenge students included, “what worked?”, “what did you notice?”, and “let’s break that down.”

Conclusion

The requirements set forth by AMTA to teach as full-time music therapy faculty state that one must have a master’s degree in music therapy or a related field and three years of full-time clinical experience or its equivalent in part-time work. Like many degree tracks, the faculty is expected to be an expert in the profession, with no requirement in pedagogical education. Familiarity with the Appreciative Education framework would provide a pedagogical foundation for music therapy educators to apply these innovative practices within music therapy education and clinical training. Applying this framework holds promise to positively transform the teaching and learning experience of faculty and students alike.

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